

Introduction

Pető, Andrea; Schrijvers, Klaartje

Preprint / Preprint

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Pető, A., & Schrijvers, K. (2009). Introduction. In A. Pető, & K. Schrijvers (Eds.), *Faces of death: visualising history* (pp. -). Pisa: Edizioni Plus - Pisa University Press. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-71896-4>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



Creating Links and Innovative Overviews for a New History Research Agenda
for the Citizens of a Growing Europe

THEMATIC WORK GROUP 4

Work, Gender and Society IV

CLIOHRES.net is a largescale research project, supported by the European Commission through the Sixth Framework Programme of its Directorate General for Research as a "Network of Excellence" for European History. It includes 180 researchers (90 staff and 90 doctoral students) from 45 universities in 31 countries. Working together in six thematic work groups, their aim is to achieve greater understanding of both the histories and the representations of the past current in Europe today, highlighting both diversities and connections.

The Consortium

| | |
|---|---|
| Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz (Austria) | Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy) |
| Universiteit Gent (Belgium) | Università degli Studi di Padova (Italy) |
| Sofijski Universitet "Sveti Kliment Ohridski" (Bulgaria) | Università di Pisa (Italy) |
| Univerzita Karlova v Praze (Czech Republic) | Latvijas Universitāte, Riga (Latvia) |
| Panepistimio Kyprou (Cyprus) | L-Università ta' Malta (Malta) |
| Roskilde Universitetscenter (Denmark) | Universiteit Utrecht (The Netherlands) |
| Tartu Ülikool (Estonia) | Universitetet i Oslo (Norway) |
| Turun Yliopisto (Finland) | Uniwersytet Jagiellonski, Krakow (Poland) |
| Université Pierre Mendès-France, Grenoble II (France) | Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal) |
| Université de Toulouse II - Le Mirail (France) | Universidade Aberta (Portugal) |
| Universität Potsdam (Germany) | Universitatea Babeş Bolyai din Cluj-Napoca (Romania) |
| Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg (Germany) | Universitatea 'Stefan cel Mare', Suceava (Romania) |
| University of Aberdeen (Great Britain) | Moskowskij Gosudarstvennyj Oblastnoj Universitet (Russian Federation) |
| Cardiff University (Great Britain) | Univerzitet u Novom Sadu (Serbia) |
| University of Sussex (Great Britain) | Slovenskej Akademie Vied (Slovakia) |
| Ethniko kai Kapodistriako Panepistimio Athinon (Greece) | Univerza v Mariboru (Slovenia) |
| Aristotelio Panepistimio Thessalonikis (Greece) | University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) |
| Debreceni Egyetem (Hungary) | Universidad de Alcalá de Henares (Spain) |
| Miskolci Egyetem (Hungary) | Universidad de Deusto (Spain) |
| Háskóli Íslands (Iceland) | Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain) |
| National University of Ireland, Galway/Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh (Ireland) | Universitat de Valencia (Spain) |
| Università di Bologna (Italy) | Universität Basel (Switzerland) |
| | Orta Dogu Teknik Üniversitesi (Turkey) |

Faces of Death Visualising History

edited by
Andrea Pető and Klaartje Schrijvers

EDIZIONI
plūs
pisa university
press



Faces of death: visualising history / edited by Andrea Petö and Klaartje Schrijvers. - Pisa: Plus-Pisa university press, c2009. – (Thematic work group. 4, Work, gender and society; 4) 704.949309 (21.)



1. Morte <iconografia> - Storia I. Petö, Andrea II. Schrijvers, Klaartje

CIP a cura del Sistema bibliotecario dell'Università di Pisa

This volume is published thanks to the support of the Directorate General for Research of the European Commission, by the Sixth Framework Network of Excellence CLIOHRES.net under the contract CIT3-CT-2005-006164.

The volume is solely the responsibility of the Network and the authors; the European Community cannot be held responsible for its contents or for any use which may be made of it.

Cover: Klaartje Schrijvers, *Faces of Death* (2009), charcoal on paper.

© Klaartje Schrijvers 2009

© 2009 CLIOHRES.net

The materials published as part of the CLIOHRES Project are the property of the CLIOHRES.net Consortium.

They are available for study and use, provided that the source is clearly acknowledged.

cliohres@cliohres.net - www.clioehres.net

Published by Edizioni Plus – Pisa University Press

Lungarno Pacinotti, 43

56126 Pisa

Tel. 050 2212056 – Fax 050 2212945

info.plus@adm.unipi.it

www.edizioniplus.it - Section "Biblioteca"

Member of



Association of American
University Presses

ISBN: 978-88-8492-651-7

Linguistic revision

Ralph Nisbet

Informatic editing

Răzvan Adrian Marinescu

Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| Preface | |
| <i>Ann Katherine Isaacs, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson</i> | pag. VII |
| The CLIOHRES Network of Excellence | » IX |
| Introduction | |
| <i>Andrea Pető, Klaartje Schrijvers</i> | » XI |
| Faces of Death: Welcome to the Desert of the Real | |
| <i>La Douleur est Physique</i> | |
| <i>Klaartje Schrijvers</i> | » 1 |
| Death and the Picture. Representation of War Criminals and Construction of a Divided Memory about World War II in Hungary | |
| <i>Andrea Pető</i> | » 39 |
| Photographical Representation of Death in Historiography: Examples from the German Occupation of Norway | |
| <i>Synne Corell</i> | » 57 |
| “Death shall have no dominion”. Dutch Flood Disasters in the Press | |
| <i>Jose de Kruif</i> | » 91 |
| Photography as a Source. The Changing Representation of the Image of Mafia Women by the Italian Press | |
| <i>Alice De Toni</i> | » 121 |
| The Faces of Kartini and Anne Frank. The Death of the Author in Dutch History | |
| <i>Berteke Waaldijk</i> | » 147 |
| Faces of Death: An Artistic Representation | |
| The Dramatisation of Death in the Second Half of the 19th Century. The Paris Morgue and Anatomy Painting | |
| <i>Mireia Ferrer Álvarez</i> | » 163 |
| Images of the Dead in the Middle Ages. The Capitals of the <i>Palazzo Ducale</i> in Venice | |
| <i>Claudia Bertazzo</i> | » 189 |
| Facing Death on the Sea. Ex-voto Paintings of Northern Adriatic Sailing Ships in the 19th Century | |
| <i>Tea Mayhew</i> | » 207 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Notes on Contributors | » 229 |
| Index | » 233 |

Preface

Is seeing believing? In general, the answer is yes. We do believe what we see. But should we? *Faces of Death. Visualising History* addresses the question from a historians' point of view, looking at how images are used, and how images that purport to tell us 'the truth' may actually distort or obscure it.

The volume, edited by Andrea Pető and Klaartje Schrijvers, has been written by nine researchers from eight countries. It builds on the previous 3 volumes published by the Thematic Work Group 4 of the CLIOHRES Network of Excellence, devoted to "Work, Gender and Society". It extends the group's analysis on sources to 'visual' – i.e. unwritten – sources, examining critically their use in historical research and in building widely shared images of the past.

During the 20th and 21st centuries the ever-growing ability to furnish images of world events in 'real time' has made plausible, even unavoidable, the idea that we 'know' what is happening, around the world – every day, even every minute as laptops and cell-phones update us while we are at work or play. Images, including those purveyed by television, cinema, internet and the press, surround us, and increasingly replace the written word as the primary description of what appears to be or is given the appearance of 'reality'. The unprecedented availability of images and their increasing importance in documenting the present and the past necessitates careful consideration and understanding of what images actually say, and about what.

The superfluity of images and manipulations of them in our societies has led to extreme and paradoxical but instructive formulations: Jean Baudrillard for example held that images, "simulacra" of the real, have become the real: life imitates the virtual, rather than vice versa. *Faces of Death. Visualising History* invites us to participate in a complex critical game, following the leads of Foucault, Baudrillard, Lacan, not to speak of the film "Matrix" (1999) and its rereading by Slavoj Žižek after 11 September 2001.

In "Matrix", Morpheus shows Neo that he, like the rest of humanity, has been living in a completely artificial world, made of false images which obscure the fact that 'outside' there is only decay and ruin. Like Morpheus, first section of the volume 'welcomes us to the desert of the real'. The authors first force us to gaze courageously at the horror of death, usually concealed, and then to examine the uses to which representations or non representations of death have been put during the past century. Death – specifically death as documented in photographs – is taken as the heuristic key: death as an act, the final act of life, a phase in human existence, which – whether private or public, due to violence or to 'old age' – tends to be obscured and pushed away from awareness, especially when it occurs in our own well-off western countries.

We see how photography, at first sight a guarantee of truthfulness, is in fact a guarantee of partiality, no less than the written word: we are prisoners of the photographer who

framed the picture, of the words that tell us what the picture means, and of the context in which we interpret the results of each split second opening of the shutter. We are shown how some images become icons, places of memory, in substance as such representing but almost ceasing to communicate the reality of war, disaster or genocide, while others, equally 'true' or untrue are forgotten or used to contest official or mainstream views.

In the second section, *Faces of Death: an Artistic Representation*, the use of images of death is further historicised by exploring artistic representations of death and their relation to changing social attitudes from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. From the Doge's Palace in Venice, to the Parisian Salons, to the Croatian coasts, we see how artistic representations concur in society's efforts to exorcise death, communicating how it can be fit into an accepted or reassuring world view: differently but with a function analogous to that of photography, examined in the first section. In stone capitals, realistic anatomy painting or popular ex-votos, artworks place death or the risk of it in a solid framework where awareness of its reality can be controlled or kept at bay.

The cover illustration is a charcoal sketch by Klaartje Schrijvers. The faces, different and yet the same, with their eyes closed to shield us from the unsupportable blank that we might see in the open eyes of the dead, form a pattern: a pattern that could be extended to infinity by repetition. The exercise of drawing, or for the reader, of observing the drawing, is itself a step in the process of understanding the layered complexity of our attitude toward death and its representations.

The research group on "Work, Gender and Society", as mentioned, is part of the larger CLIOHRES Network, dedicated to exploring how better knowledge and more widespread understanding of the history of Europe can contribute to building European citizenship. For making its activities possible, we thank the European Commission which supports the Network morally and financially through its Sixth Framework Programme. We thank the University of Pisa, its Rector and central Administration, for its support in carrying out the complex tasks necessary to coordinate the Network. We thank the CLIOHRES team (Laura Burgisano, Răzvan Adrian Marinescu, Viktoriya Kolp, Cecilia Asso, Laura Franciosi and Tommaso Salamone) for their dedication and effective work in a variety of sectors, including those directly connected with this publication.

We particularly commend the Thematic Work Group 4, its members, its leaders, the editors and authors of this volume. Special acknowledgement goes to Carla Salvaterra for her untiring help in the final stages of its preparation. *Faces of Death. Visualising History* deserves a wide readership: it is exemplary in bringing the historians' view to bear on a central issue of our time in a form which is clear, incisive and meaningful for both specialists and a broader public.

Ann Katherine Isaacs
University of Pisa

Guðmundur Hálfðanarson
University of Iceland

The CLIOHRES Network of Excellence

CLIOHRES is a consortium of 45 universities and research institutions in 31 countries. Each institution is represented by two senior researchers and two doctoral students coming from various academic fields – primarily from history, but also from art history, archaeology, architecture, philology, philosophy, political science, sociology, literary studies and geography. The 180 researchers in the network are divided into six “Thematic Work Groups”, each of which deals with a broadly defined research area – ‘States, Institutions and Legislation’, ‘Power and Culture’, ‘Religion and Philosophy’, ‘Work, Gender and Society’, ‘Frontiers and Identities’, and ‘Europe and the Wider World’. Furthermore, the Network as a whole addresses ‘transversal themes’ of general relevance. These include ‘Citizenship’, ‘Migration’, ‘Discrimination and Tolerance’, ‘Gender’ and ‘Citizenship and Identities’; one of these is targeted each year. As a Network of Excellence, CLIOHRES is not an ordinary research project. It does not focus on a single research question or on a set of specific questions. Rather it is conceived as a forum where researchers representing various national and regional traditions can meet and elaborate their work in new ways thanks to structured interaction with their colleagues. The objective is not only to transcend the national boundaries that still largely define historical research agendas, opening new avenues for research, but also to use those very differences to become critically aware of how current research agendas have evolved. Thus, the goal is to examine basic and unquestioned attitudes about ourselves and others, which are rooted in the ways that the scientific community in each country looks at history.

Historians create and cultivate selective views of the national or local past, which in turn underpin pervasive ideas about identities and stereotypes: national, religious, gender, political, etc. National historiographies today are still largely shaped by problems and preoccupations reflecting previous political and cultural contexts. CLIOHRES aims to create and promote a new structure and agenda for the community of historical research, redirecting its critical efforts along more fruitful lines. The Network began its work in June 2005, thanks to a five-year contract with the European Commission through the Sixth Framework Programme of its Directorate General for Research, under Priority 7, dealing with “Citizenship”. Its activities aim to contribute to the development of innovative approaches to history as regards both the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area. The Network works for a closer connection between research and learning/teaching, holding that this is essential in order to ensure that European citizens possess the necessary information, conceptual tools and more in general the vital critical and self-critical abilities which they will need in the future.

All the thematic groups have worked from the start according to a common research plan, beginning in the first year with reconnaissance or mapping, of how the questions

perceived as important for the thematic area appear in the different national historiographies. During the second year they defined 'connecting' themes, which are relevant for research in a wider geographical and chronological context. The third phase concentrated on comparing and reviewing sources and methodologies; the fourth focuses on 'cross-fertilisation', that is on showing how problems identified in the previous phases can be developed in new contexts. During the last phase, the groups will define new and relevant projects, in the broadest sense, for future research in the sector.

Each Thematic Work Group publishes one volume a year in order to share and discuss the results of their work with the broader academic community. The volumes are not conceived as the final word on the issues that they deal with, but rather as work-in-progress. In addition to the six Thematic Work Group volumes, the Network publishes one common volume per year dealing with the transversal theme targeted. It also publishes abridged versions of the dissertations written by doctoral students who have participated in its work. Together the volumes already published form an invitation to discuss the results of the Network and the novel directions that are emerging from its work; they also constitute a unique patrimony of up-to-date studies on well-known and less well-known aspects of Europe and its history.

All publications are available in book form and on the www.clio-hres.net website. They can be downloaded without charge. A list of publications to date can be found at the end of this volume.

Introduction

Death is a private matter, artists should not invade the death of others¹.

But what about historians? Especially when death is no longer a private matter because it is photographed and filmed, and these images are printed, posted and transmitted in different ways. This book aims to revisit history and history writing as they are affected by the boom in media images of death. We aim to explore how images of death have evolved in a European context, interacting with the collective memory and how these images have influenced the way history is written.

The inflation of images about war and death has alarmed responsible intellectuals for a long time. Virginia Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* as a response to the first war waged on the pages of newspapers, the Spanish Civil War. She decided not to add pictures of atrocities in the first edition. The contributors to the present volume have decided otherwise. Our aim is to respond to the challenge imposed on history writing by the increasing number of images of death.

In order to overcome the gap existing between historians as an academic profession and the democratisation of history expressed in the memory-boom, making sources such as photos accessible, historians need to engage in critical debate as to how historical understanding may have changed.

This endeavor is especially timely since historians are creating frames of interpretation even as they answer the questions “what happened?” and “what might have happened?” Empiricism and accuracy are the main issues which continue to influence historians working on visual sources as well. The imprisonment of history writing inside the “paradigm of Truth” has been questioned by theoreticians such as Hayden White, who points out that the narratives of history are not only about facts of the past, but that there is a literary and metaphorical dimension to history writing.

In the present period of time we are overwhelmed with pictures and moving pictures as representations of a ‘certain’ true event. Visual images are often used and read as ‘virtual’ proof that something actually took place. What we do not see is everything that remains outside the frame of these pictures, whatever the photographer or film-maker chose not to show, whatever remains invisible because it did not survive the test of being representative enough of a certain event over a certain period of time.

In the Cliohres context, where history is rethought and all participants are confronted with different national backgrounds and thus different historiographies, photography as a historical source could not be left out. The importance of images in expressing and communicating meanings about work had already been emphasized during the third year discussion of the Group dedicated to exploring sources and methodologies. In that

context visual sources were considered among many different discursive strategies, as can be seen in the volume *Rhetorics of Work*². Our fourth year meetings gave us the possibility to develop our discussion and concentrate on images in a different perspective. Especially in this international context it was a challenge to investigate the different national and historiographical approaches towards visual sources as practiced by historians interested in work, gender and society and to see how problems and methodologies developed in one context could be applied to a different historiographical setting. When rethinking the writing of history, photography and pictures inevitably play an increasing important role. Realizing that historians in the future will be overwhelmed by visual sources and in contrast to the present situation will have to deal with a lack of written sources (because of internet, e-mail, paper shredders, iPhone and so on), we hope to contribute with this volume to the rethinking of the use of photography and pictures as highly important but problematic sources.

As the main theme we chose the representation of suffering, pain and death. These three items – depending on the importance of the historical event concerned (such as the Second World War) – are often stereotyped, framed or even imprisoned in an iconic representation.

It is not a happy theme, but as both editors had worked on it already because of their personal research interests it seemed a challenging way of confronting the Group's area of interest (work, gender and society) with a topic which crosses not just histories of work and society but dialogues in unexpected ways with history in itself. Surprisingly there was a great interest. Historians have a very ambiguous attitude towards death. In a certain way death means the end of history, as far it concerns a person's lifetime. But most of our research deals with people who died a long time ago. It is if we talk to the dead – they are always a part of our analyses – and in the solitude of our investigation we often have the feeling that we bring them back alive. However, we mercilessly are confronted with the fact one day they died in one way or the other. This fascination with the death of people we are not familiar with and our personal relations as historians towards this event, was the ultimate drive for all authors in this volume to contribute. Besides that, death incarnates all aspects of life, not least gender. Once we are dead one might say we are genderless, but the way our death is represented is highly determined by how gender is perceived in a certain society and in a certain period of time.

The book consists of two parts. In a first part the chapter deal with the primary research question: the documentary impact and history of photographic representations of 'death' and its effect on our collective memory of death in 20th-century historical events. The second part deals with the representation of death, pain and suffering in art and/or the representation of pain, suffering and death as art.

The first part of the book also focuses on 'missing' or 'forgotten' pictures in an attempt to find out why they were neglected, why they were deliberately or accidentally not se-

lected to form part of our 'collective' memory. The second part of the book consists of chapters analysing pictures where death, on the contrary, has been very present: images at the Palazzo Ducale in Venice or paintings of shipwrecks seen as constitutive parts of collective memory-forming identity.

Initially the theoretical framework of the book was inspired by the work of Carol Zemel who in *Emblems of Atrocity. Holocaust Liberation Photographs*, examined the iconic power of Holocaust liberation photographs and focused on their force as emblems of the past. This force is largely due to the aesthetic power of the pictures and the Christological framework in which the iconography is discursively wrapped.

This Christological discourse implicitly forms an important issue in this book, at least from a methodological point of view. Throughout the centuries it has had an enormous impact on both the representation and the interpretation of death and mourning in the Western world (the crucifixion of Christ and the *Pietà*). The established European iconography of death is deeply influenced by the spiritual order and response to iconisation of death, and the ways in which a sacralising aura and Christological frame have been set around what nonetheless feels like a *transgressive* event. Looking at the dead (or collective atrocities) makes us feel uncomfortable, ashamed of our inappropriate voyeurism. At the same time there is an undeniable fascination with death, a desire to face it or at least to face up to representations of it³.

The question, however, is not to what extent this fascination is morally and ethically objectionable, but to what extent the Christological iconography has had an effect on our visual memory of death. Moreover, is the way images of death are received in western historiography not automatically embedded in a western Christological framework? To a certain degree the answer must be yes. No art historian will deny the enormous influence of western Christian culture on the history of art. Until today, and even within the work of contemporary artists commonly known as secular, viewers often recognise in one way or another a reference to Christ's passion.

In this book, however, we focus on *documentary* representation: how death is documented with an intent to show 'how it was'. We explicitly want to examine how such visual representations of the dead, whether or not they are embedded in the Christological framework, can be analysed as part of the discourse of telling the truth. Furthermore, it is our goal to put these kinds of representation 'into the picture' when, seen from the point of view of our collective visual memory, they are unknown, forgotten or missing.

Such missing pictures, analysed in the first section of the book, by definition never achieved the status of icons and emblems in our visual memory. So unlike Carol Zemel who was mentioned earlier, we will not be focusing on iconic pictures and their force as emblems of the past, but on examples of pictures which are absent from our visual reconstruction/perception of that past.

This brings us to a range of pertinent questions about the goal of history (making) itself. In a broader sense, the book aims to investigate the rules of engagement with traces of the past, the rules of engagement open to historical work when it tackles the final act of life: death. It aims to explore how we think about the past and how historians make sense, for a wider audience, of the traces left behind. The question emerges how the pictures examined here in this volume shape collective memory? Why, for instance, did historians choose one kind of representation of death in the Second World War to analyse or use as an illustration, and not another one?

For what concerns the 20th century, the problem of missing pictures is not caused by a lack of available material. On the contrary, the mass-media have produced an overkill of information. This brings us to the everlasting and essential questions in history research: what do you select and why? A political agenda is never far away, but not all choices are made because of deliberate reflection. In *Faces of Death* with its different contributions on the representation of death in history, we try to illuminate how pictures have often been automatically chosen because of their aesthetic force and consequently their ability to abstract from a specific narrow contextual vision. The pictures analysed in this volume often do not stand the test of expected aesthetic representation. They were not meant to be iconised, but predestined to disappear into oblivion for ever. And yet they reveal an unexpected but no less true vision of a particular past.

In this book we aim to interpret history as ‘vision’, a vision on the issue of violence and death. That will help us to envision written history as a secular metaphor about death without being caught in the dominant interpretative frame of Christian iconography.

VISUALISING HISTORY

For most of the first 100 years since the professionalisation of history in the first decades of the 19th century, historical research has been mediated almost exclusively by printed texts. History was written by historians, read by colleagues and the public in books. The rise of new media, photography, film, radio, television, has brought new ways of producing history and created an audience for history that may not read books, but rather looks at images and listens to sound. The rise of the new digital media has resulted in unprecedented possibilities of storing and networking. Production, distribution, exhibition and storage of history are no longer limited to printed texts. This has had an important impact. According to Manovich the rise of new media has blurred the borders between production and consumption⁴. Transferring this conclusion to the field of history, it means that historians are no longer the only ones producing narratives about the past. This has several consequences. First, the authority of the historian as an author is challenged. Audiences and the public claim the right to make their own histories. Both emancipatory and nationalist conservative groups create, produce, and represent their own histories. This democratisation of history has resulted in a gap iso-

lating historians as an academic profession; we historians must ponder how historical thinking has changed due to the rise of new media. Second, it means that historians today can and must use other than textual sources; they face the challenge of integrating them in their histories. Sounds and images can be reproduced, readers require this, the public expects it, and non-historians are more experienced at doing this than historians. Historians face a difficult and demanding task.

These observations call to mind some important questions that arose during the preparation of this book. Considering the main theme, one of the most crucial questions was, of course, how death, pain and suffering were represented in different periods of time, and moreover, how historians have represented them in their turn. How can one combine visual and textual sources in any adequate way? Consequently, the question emerged how historians deal with death as the end point of a narrative, as something that escapes signification. What rhetorical devices have been used to give meaning to death, pain and suffering? The chapter in the volume analysing photographs about Norway and World War II is a good example of that. Another initial question that influenced many of the authors in choosing their research subject was which images of suffering, pain and death had become famous in public representations of history and which images remained invisible? And why? Did gender, for instance, play a role in this selection? Some of the chapters even explicitly deal with the question whether the representation of death in history is gendered or if death is beyond gender? What does that mean? Last but not least, all authors tried to explore existing and/or new methodologies as a tool to assess the value and meaning of images. What types of historical representation create room for death, pain and suffering, and how do we use them in historiographical analysis?

The aim of this book was to collect a range of studies about visual sources which confront us with our own stereotyped view of the past, and to analyse this through different kinds of theory and methodological approach, such as new cultural history which focuses on representation of visual, auditory and 'feeling' sensations (Natalie Davis and Peter Burke); Foucault on the visibility of the body; histories of the emotions, in particular compassion and horror (Sontag, Haskell, Lacqueur); theories on gender and representation of suffering, pain and death; work on Christian iconography in documentary representations of history (Zemel); and reflection on visual representations of political violence and execution.

THE SEARCH FOR A MUTUAL APPROACH

In the volume the authors pay special attention to four issues where the analysis of iconographical sources is concerned: materiality, selectivity, temporality and authenticity. These can be used as tools for analysis, each of them pointing to a different methodological problem in using pictures as a historical source. All the chapters in this book explicitly or implicitly used these four categories as tools of analysis.

The *materiality* of the visual source seems to be its most obvious facet, but causes a range of difficulties for the researcher that cannot be overlooked. Materiality not only concerns the fact of 'being there', the fact that a picture exists: it is inextricably linked to the issue of *selectivity*. Or in other words the fact that it is 'still there', or is shown at all. Historians working with photos are automatically dealing with a mass-medium, whether these pictures were used in the press or not. Because of technical innovations at the end of the 19th century, cameras became accessible to everyone. Consequently, the number of pictures increased astronomically both for private use and in the press. The methodological problem, however, lies in the specific characteristic of the picture as an object. Photos and films are often used as proof. This proof is based on synchronicity: the photographer was there when the event pictured actually took place. However, the *meaning* of the event can still be debated. Another specific characteristic of photography is that pictures can be copied several times and at the same time can easily be destroyed. Lots of pictures disappeared because of the iconoclastic character of our age: photos have been destroyed for self-interest or self protection, for instance. A historical period can be characterised not only by its fragmentation but also by its visual representation. Here *materiality* and *selectivity* are clearly intertwined. At the same time this is also a matter of *authenticity*. Photos can be manipulated, certain parts cut off, airbrushed or painted in. But the most important thing is that every picture is always the result of choices made by the photographer: what is in the picture and what is left out. That is why Geertz, for instance, sees it as the task of research not only to analyse signs but also the lack of signs. This opens up unlimited space for interpretation. Thus the knowledge represented by a photograph is not knowledge in the strict positivist sense of the word. Do visual sources have a meaning or do they rather produce a meaning? This brings us to the issue of *temporality* – the time-frame. Time is the most important constitutive part of a photo. At the moment the photo was taken, the event has already passed, it has become history, and it is remembered by the photographer and by the picture itself. Photography transforms one's perspective on reality to memory, a frozen memory, and a privileged representation. The past in the present is an unfinished past and constructs different parallel pasts. On the other hand, there remains the illusion that at the moment when the photo was taken life stood still. *Temporality* is a key concept of history and precisely this *time-frame* is questioned by photos. The photo is a temporary list of visible items. But at the moment the photo was taken the object was lost, only its memory exists in the form of the photo. The question, however, emerges: how is this memory is then constructed?

Using visual representations as a historical source forces the researcher to take into account a range of 'hidden' difficulties. Their materiality, selectivity, authenticity and temporality are just some of these difficulties. We might, on the one hand, conclude that a photograph is a representation and an object at the same time, which is given meaning depending on the time and period. But the same photograph can also be interpreted very differently. The canonised meanings necessarily create counter-canonised

meanings. Hence one could add a fifth issue to reconsider: the political struggle for a monopoly on interpretation among historians. This is an issue of power: whose pictures are we remembering and who is giving the meaning to what we think we see?

NINE DIFFERENT CASES

With this power issue in mind all the authors in this book were fully aware of the impact their personal analyses might have on the meaning accorded the pictures they chose. None of them claims to have given an exclusive interpretation, but all of them explored in a very personal way the diverse possible ways of giving the pictures meaning.

The chapters by Klaartje Schrijvers and Andrea Pető deal with the “face of death” in the executed. But in both studies ‘forgotten’ pictures were analysed, pictures that for decades had been hidden in the archives, un-catalogued, not meant to be shown or known. In both cases it was even impossible to identify the dead properly. In *La Douleur est Physique* Klaartje Schrijvers explored the complex mechanisms of interaction between pictures of cruel death and their spectators, by analysing 18 pictures of 16 executed French *maquis* during the Second World War. The pictures were found in one of the thousands of files of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), in the National Archives and Record Administration (Maryland). Hidden in a file with almost no references, they also seemed unusual, an atypical representation of the death we usually connect with the Second World War. Considering Lacan’s theory about the ‘real’ that does not let itself be pictured, Klaartje Schrijvers tries to release the pictures, and thus the unidentified *maquis*, from their non-historicity by giving them a dignified ‘meaning’. In *Death and the Picture. Representation of War Criminals and Construction of a Divided Memory of World War II in Hungary* Andrea Pető poses the problem of the execution of women. She questions the absence of women as perpetrators in history, because of the gender-blindness of national historiography about perpetrators in general. Would our historical memory of the Second World War have been different if pictures of executed women had been given a place in our collective visual memory?

Another study dealing with the Second World War is Synne Corell’s *War, Photographical Representations of Death in Historiography: Examples from the German Occupation of Norway*. Whereas in the two previous chapters the face of the dead was omnipresent, Synne Corell observed that in the three books she analyses the face of the dead is almost absent. The historians responsible for the illustrations in these histories almost entirely focused on material destruction, the ‘burning of farms’, and tend to leave out photographs of the ‘killing of our men’. This same phenomenon also forms core content in the study by José De Kruif, “*Death shall have no dominion*”. *Dutch Flood Disasters in the Press*. The Netherlands have a long history of flood disasters, though the one that took place in 1953 was perhaps the most devastating. More than 1800 people were drowned and another 100,000 had to be evacuated. Although in this period press photography

had already become very common, and many newspapers reported on the disaster with a range of pictures, hardly any of the pictures showed the dead, at least not explicitly. This case pre-eminently illustrates how pictures acquire their meaning from the textual sources: the pictures of the 1953 flood disaster only became recognisable through the accompanying explanation in the newspaper.

The face of the dead seems to be totally absent among the faces of the living. But is this really so? The chapters by Alice De Toni and Berteke Waaldijk illustrate how death can be omnipresent, without being shown. In *Photography as a source. The Changing Representation of the Image of Mafia Women by the Italian Press*, Alice De Toni analyses pictures of mourning mafia women (in the 1960s) and self-confident stylish mafia women (in the 1980s) – all of them alive. However, death is omnipresent, hidden behind the pictures, suggested by the accompanying texts in the newspaper, explicitly there in the minds of these women, who have lost one of their male relatives: their husband, their brother, their son. In *The Faces of Raden Kartini and Anne Frank. The Death of the Author in Dutch history*, Berteke Waaldijk explores this paradox in depth by presenting two pictures of the living as icons of the dead. The faces of Kartini and Anne Frank have accompanied their printed words. The portraits of the living young women reminded readers of their death in specific contexts: Anne Frank in a concentration camp, the Javanese Kartini in childbirth, still nourishing the hope that she would one day become a teacher. The pictures have played a role in making these two women authors fit the gendered expectations of Dutch readers by stressing their youth and their innocence.

The second part of the book consists of three studies which in one way or another deal with death, pain and suffering in art, and the complexity arising in using such representations as a historical source. The first is written by an art historian, exploring one of her own special fields of history. In *Dramatisation of Death in the Second Half of the 19th Century: The Paris Morgue and Realistic Anatomy Painting*, Mireia Ferrer questions methods that use art as an exclusive historical documentary source. In her opinion art is not only the witness of an age, of the circumstances in which it was produced, but also an a-temporal creation and therefore transcends synchronicity. She comes to the conclusion that both the Morgue and anatomy paintings illustrate how Paris in the late 19th century transformed death into a show, since Paris itself was the biggest and greatest show on earth.

Finally the chapters by Claudia Bertazzo and Tea Mayhew respectively deal with the capital sculptures of the Palazzo Ducale (Venice) and 19th-century ex-voto paintings related to death on the sea. In *Images of Death, Images of the Dead in the Middle Ages. The Capitals of the Palazzo Ducale*, Claudia Bertazzo points out how the attitude towards death in the medieval period differed from that of our own period. In the late Middle Ages, death was omnipresent and the dead were kept alive by iconographical representations. Death marked a transition, a change in status, not an end. However, this did not result in a homogeneous representation. The choice of a specific representation

depended on its functional meaning. In the case of the Palazzo Ducale there was no room for the fear of dying, since this fear results from human frailty which has no place in the eschatological message of the Bible. In *Facing Death on the Sea. Ex-Voto Paintings of the Northern Adriatic Sailing Ships in the 19th Century*, Tea Mayhew analyses paintings of ships on which the local people from villages in eastern Istria served and often faced death during rough weather. As a historical source ex-voto paintings can be seen as the presentation of survival as well as the presentation of death and the way in which the survivors coped with the trauma of facing imminent death. Ex-voto paintings have a long tradition in Christianity. They are actually a continuation of the oldest form of religious expression – offering a gift to god(s). A votive painting did not need to be glamorous. Representation of a dangerous situation in which life was at risk was more important than the question of style; a painter was just a transmitter of information about such events. In her study Tea Mayhew clearly illustrates how this kind of painting was not influenced by different art styles. Such representations were related, rather, to the development of visual language as a specific means of communicating past events.

Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* argued that pictures resist generalizing about ‘war’⁵. This book can only offer fragmented views on a topic which still remains the biggest challenge ahead of us all, one that none of us can escape taking into consideration: Death.

Andrea Pető

Central European University, Budapest

Klaartje Schrijvers

Brussels, Belgium

NOTES

- ¹ J. M. Coetzee, *Elisabeth Costello*, New York 2003, p. 174.
- ² Y. Yannitsiotis, D. Lampropoulou, C. Salvaterra (eds.), *Rhetorics of Work*, Pisa 2008.
- ³ C. Dean, *Empathy, Suffering, and Holocaust "Pornography"*, in Id., *The Fragility of Empathy after Holocaust*, Ithaca NY 2004, pp. 16-42.
- ⁴ L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge MA 2001.
- ⁵ V. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, London 2003, p. 125.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ankersmit F.R., *History and Tropology: the Rise and Fall of Metaphor*, Berkeley 1994.
- Burke P., *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London 2001.
- Davis Zemon N., *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*, Cambridge MA 2002.
- Dean C., *Empathy, Suffering, and Holocaust "Pornography"*, in Dean C., *The Fragility of Empathy after Holocaust*, Ithaca NY 2004, pp. 16-42.
- Haskell F., *History and its Images. Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, New Haven - London 1993.
- Lacqueur W. (ed.), *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, New Haven 2001.
- Manovich L., *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge MA 2001.
- Sontag S., *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York 2003.
- Woolf V., *Three Guineas*, London 2003.
- Zemel C., *Emblems of Atrocity. Holocaust Liberation Photographs*, in Hornstein S., Jacobowitz F. (eds.), *Image and Remembrance. Representation and the Holocaust*, Boomington 2003, pp. 201-219.